

As great and sudden as were the events that have just unfolded in an instant before our eyes, the author of the present work is entitled to say that they did not surprise him. This book was written fifteen years ago with but a single thought as the author's constant preoccupation: the impending, irresistible, universal advent of democracy in the world. Reread this book: on every page you will find a solemn warning to all men that the form of society and the condition of humanity are changing and that new destinies are at hand.

At the beginning these words were inscribed:

The gradual development of equality⁸⁰ is therefore a providential fact. It has the essential characteristics of one: it is universal, durable, and daily proves itself to be beyond the reach of man's powers. Not a single event, not a single individual, fails to contribute to its development. Is it wise to believe that a social movement that originated so far in the past can be halted by the efforts of a single generation? Does anyone think that democracy, having destroyed feudalism and vanquished kings, will be daunted by the bourgeois and the rich? Will it stop now that it has become so strong and its adversaries so weak?

The man who, in the face of a monarchy strengthened rather than shaken by the Revolution of July, wrote these lines, which events have made prophetic, may today, without fear, once again draw the public's attention to his work.

80. The actual text reads "equality of conditions," but in this foreword Tocqueville, quoting himself, wrote simply "égalité."

He should also be permitted to add that current circumstances give his book a topical interest and practical utility that it did not have when it first appeared.

Monarchy existed then. Today, it is destroyed. The institutions of America, which were merely a subject of curiosity for monarchical France, should be a subject of study for republican France. It is not force alone that provides the seat of a new government; it is good laws. After the combatant, the lawmaker. One has destroyed, the other lays a foundation. To each his work. If the question in France is no longer whether we shall have a monarchy or a republic, it remains to be seen whether we shall have an agitated republic or a tranquil one, a regular republic or an irregular one, a peaceful republic or a belligerent one, a liberal republic or an oppressive one, a republic that threatens the sacred rights of property and family or one that recognizes and consecrates them. An awesome problem, the solution to which matters not just to France but to the entire civilized world. If we save ourselves, we also save all the peoples who surround us. If we go down, they all go down with us. Depending on whether we have democratic liberty or democratic tyranny, the destiny of the world will be different, and it can be said that today it is up to us whether in the end the republic is established everywhere or abolished everywhere.

Now, this problem, which we have only just begun to face, was resolved in America sixty years ago. There, for sixty years, the principle of popular sovereignty that we have just now enthroned among us has reigned unchallenged. There it has been put into practice in the most direct, the most unlimited, the most absolute manner. For sixty years, the people that has made this principle the common source of all its laws has grown steadily in population, territory, and wealth, and—note this well—throughout that period it has been not only the most prosperous but the most stable of all the peoples of the earth. While all the nations of Europe were ravaged by war or torn by civil discord, the American nation has remained, alone in the civilized world, at peace. Nearly all of Europe has been turned upside down by revolutions; America has not even had riots. There, the republic has not disrupted all rights but preserved them. There, individual property has enjoyed more guarantees than in any other country in the world, and anarchy has remained as unheard-of as despotism.

Where else can we look for greater hopes or greater lessons? Let us look to America not to copy servilely the institutions it has adopted but to better understand those that suit us, not so much to extract examples as to draw lessons, to borrow the principles of its laws rather than the details. The laws of the French Republic can and should be different in many cases from the laws that govern the United States, but the principles on which American constitutions rest—principles of order, balance of powers, true liberty, and sincere and profound respect for what is right—are indispensable in any republic and should be common to all. And one can say in advance that where such principles are not found, the republic will soon have ceased to exist.